

The Dashing Countess Cassini—Now a Sewing Woman

Gone Are the Furs and Jewels and Gorgeous Gowns of the Mistress of the Russian Ambassador's Mansion Which Were the Envy of the Washington Society Buds



Photograph of the Young Countess Cassini, Showing a Dog-Collar of Pearls With Diamond Clasp, a Long Rope of Pearls, Large Solitaire Pearl Earrings and a Star of Blazing Diamonds—Now Gone, All Gone.

THE gorgeously gowned, richly jewelled young Countess Marguerite Cassini, pet of Washington society in President Roosevelt's administration, intimate companion of his daughter Alice and chateau of the Russian Embassy, is earning her living as a sewing woman. The furs and jewels and \$1,000-gowns are gone—all gone.

The careless butterfly of fashion spent \$20,000 in a single Washington season for her own personal pin-money. Now she runs at the beck and call of American tourists, going out by the day to sew for them at the hotels and boarding houses in Florence, Italy, or taking mending back to do in her humble home.

She trudged each day from the Russian refugee quarter to labor with a needle, turning a hem, stitching a bodice or tacking on a piece of lace for bustling, unsympathetic tourists who frequented the local hostleries.

It does not seem so very long ago when Marguerite Cassini, at the time when most girls of her age still wore short dresses, became the mistress of the proud Russian Embassy, where her imperious uncle, and afterward adopted father, ruled as Ambassador. She quickly became the intimate of that fun-loving set of which President Roosevelt's daughter Alice, Mathilde Townsend and Helen Hitchcock were the leaders. This in spite of the air of mystery that gave a certain piquancy to her early life.

In those days a little girl, who was wheeled around Dupont Circle by a nursery governess, had the dashing Countess pointed out to her. A few days ago that girl, now grown to womanhood and holding a prominent place in Washington society, unpacked her trunks after a transatlantic trip and showed her friends a beautiful gown made by the niece of the ex-Russian Ambassador.

Then the story of Marguerite Cassini was out.

After the war she became a refugee from her native Russia. In straightened circumstances, her one object seemed to be to lose her identity in the shabby district of old Florence, given over to hordes of her countrymen who had become residents of Italy after the fury of Bolshevism had broken on the heads of the old Russian nobility and aristocracy.

Thirty-six years of age and still cherishing the remnants of that beauty that once made her the belle of Washington, Countess Cassini, who had already tested her voice on the professional stage and scored a failure, realized that her ability to sew was all that stood between her and starvation. So she hired out chiefly in the hotels, or with some progressive middle-class Italian family ready to profit by the Countess's exquisite taste in gowns.

Certain incidents in happier times give a very good inkling how it happens that the Countess came to attempt a renewal of her fortunes through the needle.

While in Washington she was noted for the number of hats she wore—all the product of her own nimble fingers. Besides,



The Countess Cassini in Her Costume in the Part of Elsa in "Lohengrin."

her generosity was often shown by designing and making the headgear for her intimate girl friends, who were numbered among the most fashionable society of the nation's capital. She frequently acted as their milliner in those days, and many of them were proud to wear hats that would have cost them a pretty sum if designed and made by equally as competent hands in the business world.

She also gave many novel and rather startling entertainments. At one time she had a dinner for her young friends and wrote on the invitations that each guest was expected to wear not the modern dinner gown, but an original and fantastic headpiece. After the guests had all assembled, the beautiful hostess herself appeared wearing the towering headpiece of a Russian bride of woven silver cloth, thickly sewn with pearls. Adding to this adornment long ropes of pearls were ensnared in her luxurious dark braids. From the lofty crown a veil of silver tissue floated gracefully over her shoulders.

This picturesque idea of the Countess soon became the flair of society. Fashionable women competed with each other to discover the most original headgear, and the by-play of the Countess soon set a novel and interesting fashion.

Of all the ladies in the old Czar's em-

pire, few, indeed, have had a more romantic history than Countess Cassini, and few have met such sudden rebuffs of Fate. Her origin even to this day is covered by a charitable mystery that has followed her throughout life.

Her career started while still a little girl just budding into womanhood, when Count Cassini was the Ambassador from his country located at Pekin, China. It appears that the Count was employed by the child's aunt, Mme. Schell, who was at that time a protégée of Count Cassini, to take her with him to his newly appointed post in China. But this was not quite according to the usages of proper diplomatic society, so the Russian Ambassador refused. Finally he was prevailed upon, when Mme. Schell said she would go along with her little niece, who was known at that time as Marguerite Desplanques.

This plan worked out very well, and little Marguerite, while only fifteen years of age, had the remarkable distinction of becoming an interpreter for Count Cassini and Li Hung Chang when they met to draw up the first papers that eventually gave over Manchuria to Russian suzerainty. The regular translator for the diplomatic office happened to be out at the time, and the little girl was brought in from the garden and her Chinese playmates, from whom she had learned enough



The Careless Butterfly of Fashion Who Spent \$20,000 in a Single Washington

Season for Her Own Personal Pin-money, Now Runs at the Beck and Call of American Tourists, Going Out by the Day to Sew for Them at the Hotels and Boarding Houses in Florence, Italy, or Taking Mending Back to Do in Her Humble Home.

the head of her uncle's establishment was not recognized, especially when it came to the matter of social procedure.

"Who is this pretended Countess anyway?" was the query that the ears of Count Cassini could not avoid hearing. And his explanations,

since he was a bachelor of some years standing, did not seem to satisfy the feminine element of diplomatic society. He was finally put to the test of fighting for the social prestige of the little seventeen-year-old girl that he had raised to the honor place of his establishment.

During President McKinley's administration, with a strategy that left its marks on her soul, the wives of the different ambassadors sought to teach

the Countess her place in their circle, in spite of the valiant fight she was making for her own good name.

Lord Pauncefoot, British Ambassador, and then dean of the diplomatic corps, issued invitations for a dinner party with Count Cassini and the Countess among the guests. The Countess was assigned to a table place among the other young women present—a place that was easily understood to have no official significance.

Following came a dinner by M. Cambon at the French embassy, in which the identical procedure started at the English embassy was carried out.

Then came a similar affair at the home of the German ambassador, which seemed to settle, so far as the diplomatic circle was concerned, the young lady's social aspirations in Washington.

The following Summer Count Cassini returned to this country with the news that the young lady had been made a Countess in her own right and that he had adopted her. In this way he hoped to overcome some of the exceedingly frosty receptions his niece had been receiving.

But the dashing Countess soon found that her uncle's finesse had only succeeded in stirring up another rumour. Diplomats of long standing, who were then making their home in Washington, politely but frigidly called Count Cassini's attention to the fact that the title of Countess is a very high one in Russia and that no woman had been elevated to that position since Czar Paul I. bestowed the title on Mme. de Lieven.

When Theodore Roosevelt became President, she enjoyed the highest point of her career and became one of the moving spirits of the little coterie of society belles that handed down a lively reputation for social escapades during Presi-

dent Roosevelt's time. Among her friends in those days were the present Mrs. Payne Whitney, Mrs. Joseph W. Wadsworth, Jr., Mrs. Murray Crane, Mrs. William Sterling, now of England, and Mrs. John W. Garrett, of Baltimore, who was then Alice Warder.

After the Russo-Jap War, Count Cassini was removed to Spain. There the mystery of Countess Cassini's origin began to give him so much trouble that she finally decided not to go with him to Madrid, but to take up the cultivation of a rather pleasant voice at the studio of Jean de Reszke in Paris. While there the overshadowing mystery of her place in her uncle's life pursued her. Something of a commotion, so the new dispatches of the day state, was caused by the fashionable singing school conducted by Jean de Reszke, because of the expulsion of one of the most prominent pupils without explanation. It was learned that the expelled pupil was discovered to be the author of a number of anonymous letters addressed to M. de Reszke and attacking the character of Countess Cassini. Jealousy of her success was given as the only motive for these communications, which the Countess discovered were written by one of her supposed friends.

Under M. de Reszke's tutelage the Countess learned many opera roles, but it appears that her talents as a singer were destined to come as big a cropper as her social aspirations. A little out-of-the-way theatre in Paris was the scene of her debut.

A failure was soon scented, and the Countess retired to the quiet of her beautiful apartment in Paris. There misfortunes began to assail her. Her uncle, Count Cassini, gave up his diplomatic post and went back to Russia, and soon after stopped sending her the rather substantial sums of money that had been his custom. Debts piled up fast, and the Countess kept her creditors away only by the hope that she would marry some well-to-do nobleman or American with more money than brains.

At that time she had many courtiers, but since no engagement materialized into marriage, her creditors came down on her apartment one day, seized valuables worth about \$75,000 and sold them for the mere pittance of \$5,000 to satisfy the Countess's debts.

Broken-hearted, the Countess tried once again to win a fortune with her voice. Under the name of Mme. Fabia she appeared in a second-rate Paris music hall where she knew none of her former friends would be likely to discover her. But she could not stop the downward plunge in her affairs.

The war brought on renewed hardships and now she has just been discovered in her little dressmaking room where she is glad to sew for her American friends and display her gratitude for their patronage with the same charm that made her famous in Washington in the heyday of her youth; beauty and power.

Old Photograph of Alice Roosevelt, Who Was One of the Most Intimate Friends of the Countess Cassini During Her Brilliant Career in Washington.

Chinese, as it eventually turned out, to help the diplomatic mission of Count Cassini and the famous Chinese statesman.

The success of Count Cassini's administration in China was so great that he was promoted to the United States. When he arrived the young girl, who came with him and who at that time was only seventeen years of age, was introduced as Countess Cassini, his niece. The Ambassador explained that she was the child of a nephew of his who died and that she was an orphan.

After the Ambassador had established himself, cards were sent out for the first afternoon reception of the season. His diplomatic colleagues and their wives and daughters were asked to view a portrait of his niece, Countess Cassini, by the Russian painter, Makowsky. After the guests arrived they had the pleasure of comparing the canvas with its original model, who was present.

The first glimpse of the Countess revealed the hostess of the day as of medium height and beautifully formed. Her large eyes were soulfully expressive and easily the most distinguished feature of her countenance. She wore a wealth of brown hair and had a beautiful milk-white skin, with an exquisite rose-tinted complexion and somewhat voluptuous red lips.

But she had not been in Washington very long before she became to be regarded as the algebraic X of the diplomatic circle. And she lived to see the time when few women have been so mercilessly pilloried by the gossip of her own sex. Even Count Cassini became embarrassed by the icy stares levelled over cold shoulders that his niece met with everywhere.

Led by the female members of the other diplomatic circles, the Countess's place at